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Comments on Paris 7823 and TDCS 318/04907

1. The head of the French Foreign Office, quoting his government's representative in Hanoi, has told the US Embassy that there are currently over 200,000 Chinese technicians in North Vietnam--a figure we feel to be greatly exaggerated. Our current estimate of Chinese military personnel in the North stands at a maximum of 50,000 -- a figure that has held fairly constant for several months.

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It necessarily is subject to an error of ten or twenty thousand, but we are confident that the correct figure is not nearly as high as 200,000.

2. A figure of 200,000 Chinese has been bandied about the inbred Hanoi diplomatic community for several weeks and appears to be based on two factors. One is the apparent increase in Chinese technicians in the immediate Hanoi area working on repair projects such as the Doumer bridge. A second factor is

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the pessimistic attitude of the diplomatic community, particularly the East Europeans, who appear to exaggerate Chinese influence in the North in an effort to explain their own political impotence in attempting to influence the Vietnamese.

3. [REDACTED] who recently left North Vietnam have presented a fairly accurate report on the activities of Chinese

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troops in the northern provinces of North Vietnam, and their relations with the local [REDACTED] people.

Some of the [REDACTED]

from areas where large numbers of Chinese are known to be working. When they report things they have seen themselves, [REDACTED] account seems entirely plausible. Some of the [REDACTED] comments doubtless are based on local hearsay, but the generally distrustful attitude of the North Vietnamese toward Chinese sounds entirely reasonable. We see nothing in this report, however, to help determine the total numbers of Chinese in the North.

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